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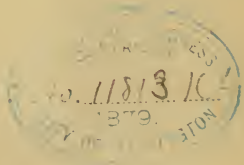




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# ALBERT GALLATIN

BY  
HENRY CABOT LODGE



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## ALBERT GALLATIN.

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FAMILY pride led the Gallatins to boast a descent from A. Atilius Callatinus, the Roman consul (A. U. C. 494 and 498). A gap of fifteen hundred years between the consul and the first appearance of the name in European history tends to invalidate this rather splendid bit of genealogy, but there can be no doubt that the Gallatins were both an old and noble family. They are first heard of in Savoy in the year 1258, and more than two centuries later they came to Geneva (1510), united with Calvin in his opposition to Rome, and associated their fortunes with those of the little Swiss city. Here they remained, and with one or two other great families governed Geneva, and sent forth many representatives to seek their fortune and win distinction in the service of foreign princes, both as soldiers and ministers. On the eve of the French Revolution the Gallatins were still in

Geneva, occupying the same position which they had held for two hundred years. They were republican nobles, simple in their manners, frugal and unostentatious in their habits of life, but genuine aristocrats of high breeding and cultivated minds. They numbered among their friends such widely different persons as Voltaire and the landgrave of Hesse, and, although not wealthy, had everything that could reasonably be desired both socially and politically.

Albert Gallatin, the most famous of the name, was born in Geneva on the 29th of January, 1761. His father died in 1765, his mother five years later, and his only sister in 1777. Although left an orphan at nine years old, Albert Gallatin was by no means lonely or unprotected. His grand-parents, a large circle of near relations, and Mlle. Pictet, an intimate friend, cared for him during his boyhood. He was thoroughly educated at the schools of Geneva, and graduated with honor from the college or academy in 1779. His grandmother then wished him to enter the army of the landgrave of Hesse, but he declined to serve "a tyrant," and a year later slipped away from Geneva and embarked for the United States. No man ever had less



reason to emigrate. A competent fortune, good prospects, social position, and a strong family connection, were all thrown aside in order to tempt fate in the New World. His relations very properly opposed his course, but they nevertheless did all in their power to smooth his way, and continued to treat him kindly, and he himself in after-life always admitted the justice of their opinions. The temper of the times, a vague discontent with the established order of things, and some political enthusiasm imbibed from the writings of Rousseau, are the best reasons that can now be assigned for Gallatin's ill-considered desertion of home and friends.

In July, 1780, Gallatin and his friend Serre landed in Massachusetts. They brought with them youth, hope, courage, and a little money, and at once entered into business. The times were unfavorable. The great convulsion of the Revolution was drawing to a close, and everything was in an unsettled condition. The young Genevans failed in business, passed an aimless and severe winter in the wilds of Maine, and returned to Boston penniless. Gallatin tried to earn a living by teaching French in Harvard College, apparently not without suc-

cess, but the cold and rigid civilization of New England repelled him, and he made his way to the South. In the backwoods of Pennsylvania and Virginia there seemed to be better chances for a young adventurer. Gallatin engaged in land speculations, and tried to lay the foundation of his fortune in a frontier farm. In 1789 he married Sophia Allegre, and every prospect seemed to be brightening. But clouds soon gathered again. After only a few months of wedlock his wife died, and Gallatin was once more alone. The solitary and desolate frontier life became now more dreary than ever; he flung himself into politics, the only outside resource open to him, and his long and eventful public career began.

The constitution of 1787 was then before the people, and Gallatin, with his dislike of strong government still upon him, threw himself into opposition and became one of the founders of the Anti-Federalist, or, as it was afterwards called, the Republican party. Elections followed to State conventions and legislatures, and Gallatin rose with surprising rapidity. Despite his foreign birth and his inability to speak English with correctness and fluency, he succeeded

wonderfully. He was helped, of course, by his sound education ; but the true cause of his success lay in his strong sense, untiring industry, courage, clear-sightedness, and great intellectual force. In 1793 he was chosen United States Senator from Pennsylvania by the votes of both political parties. No higher tribute was ever paid to character and ability than that conveyed by this election. But although party feeling did not run high enough in Pennsylvania to prevent Gallatin's election, the staunch federalists of the Senate, who had began to draw the party lines rather sharply, found the presence of the young Genevan highly distasteful. They disliked his French origin, and suspected him to be a man of levelling principles. His seat was contested on account of a technical flaw in regard to the duration of his citizenship, and the Senate annulled the election and sent him back to Pennsylvania with all the glory of political martyrdom.

The part he had already taken in the exciting scenes to which he now returned had without doubt been an efficient cause in his rejection by the Senate. The success of the new scheme of national government turned at the outset upon the re-establishment of sound finances. To

carry out the great plans which he had set on foot, Hamilton had found it necessary to lay an excise on domestic spirits. This tax bore hardly upon the western counties of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina, where the people worked many small stills, and were thus able to get their grain to market in a portable form. Strong opposition was manifested. Hamilton and his party modified the original excise law, and partly by their action, partly through the influence of Washington, the murmurs in the two Southern States died away. But in Pennsylvania concession proved fruitless, and hostility became daily more active and dangerous.

✓ In this resistance to the excise, which was peculiarly odious to the people among whom he lived, Gallatin took a leading part. He intended fully to restrain opposition within legal bounds, ✓ but he made the great mistake of embarking upon the stormy sea of resistance to law without sufficiently allowing for the character of the population. The frontiersmen of the Alleghanies were a rough and sturdy race, with a large and unfortunate admixture of wild Irish. The law-abiding American spirit was by no means supreme. Legal resistance soon devel-

oped into insurrection. Houses were burned, revenue officers assaulted and driven from the country, and the United States mail was stopped and the letters seized by the rioters. The people began to arm and associate, thus preparing forcible resistance to the Government.

Gallatin did his best to retrieve his error and prevent open war. With fine courage he faced the excited bands of riflemen who gathered at Redstone Old Fort on the 20th of August, 1794, and opposed with vigorous eloquence the use of force against the Government. He checked the excitement sufficiently to prevent bloodshed; but he was only just in time. Washington and Hamilton had at last determined to test the strength of the new Government, and were moving with an overwhelming force upon the western counties. Gallatin had blundered in exciting and leading opposition to law among so rude a people, but he had also interposed with sufficient effect to stop desperate measures, and the whiskey rebellion faded away helplessly before the national power.

Of all the men who took part in this opposition to the excise, Gallatin alone came out with credit. He was at once elected to Congress,

and took his seat as a member of the Lower House in the autumn of 1795. A foreigner, still young, and speaking English with a very defective pronounciation, he nevertheless, by sheer force of ability and industry, wrested from all competitors the leadership of the Republicans in the house, and almost at once became the most dangerous opponent whom the Federalists had ever encountered in Congress. That great party, by simple weight of ability, generally in a minority, and never in full sympathy with the mass of their countrymen, maintained their power unbroken for the first twelve years of the Government. They had established and organized that Government, and in so doing had borne down opposition with a high hand. They were as domineering as they were able, and inflamed with hatred of France, just then rising to the dignity of a party principle, they found in Gallatin an enemy who was both by origin and opinion peculiarly obnoxious to them. They attacked him unsparingly, but in vain. His perfect command of temper and moderation of speech and action, in a bitterly personal age, never failed, and were his most effective weapons ; but he made his power felt in other

ways. His clear mind and industrious habits drew him to questions of finance. He became the financier of his party, and preached unceasingly his cardinal doctrines of simplicity and economy, and was an effective critic of the measures of Government. Cool and temperate, Gallatin, when following his own theories, was usually in the right, although accused by his followers of trimming. Thus, in regard to the Jay treaty, he defended the constitutional right of the house to consider the treaty, but he did not urge rejection in this specific case. On the other hand, when following a purely party policy, he generally erred. He resisted the navy, the mainspring of Washington's foreign policy, and the chief glory of the Federalists. He opposed commercial treaties and diplomatic intercourse in a similar fashion. On all these points he was grievously wrong, and on all he changed his views after a good deal of bitter experience. The greatest period of Gallatin's career in Congress was in 1798, after the publication of the famous X. Y. Z. despatches. The insults of Talleyrand, and his shameless attempts to extort bribes from the American commissioners, roused the deep anger of the people

against France. The Federalists swept all before them, and the members of the opposition either retired from Philadelphia or went over to the Government. Alone and single-handed, Gallatin carried on the fight in Congress. The Federalists bore down on him unmercifully, and even attempted a constitutional amendment in regard to citizenship, in order to drive him from office. Still he held on, making a national struggle in the national legislature, and relying very little upon the rights of States so eagerly grasped by Jefferson and Madison. But even then the tide was turning. The strong measures of the Federalists shocked the country; the leaders of the dominant party quarrelled fiercely among themselves; and the Republicans carried the elections of 1800.

Jefferson and Burr obtained an equal number of votes, and as the constitution then stood either was entitled to the presidency, although no one questioned that it had been intended for Jefferson. The election was thrown into the House, and the Federalists, maddened by defeat, strove to give the presidency to Burr. They fortunately failed, but it was Gallatin who led the Republicans, prevented rash measures



retained the sympathy of the country, and had a careful plan prepared for any emergency.

When, after this exciting contest, Jefferson took possession of the White House (1801), there were two men, and two only, whose commanding abilities marked them for the first places in the cabinet. James Madison became Secretary of State, and Albert Gallatin Secretary of the Treasury. Wise, prudent, and conservative, Gallatin made few changes in Hamilton's arrangements, and for twelve years administered the national finances with the greatest skill. He and Jefferson were both imbued with the idea that government reduced to the lowest possible point could be carried on upon *à priori* principles resting on the assumed perfectness of human nature, and that, if this were done honestly, its authors would be implicitly trusted, and a political millennium would surely ensue. The chief burden of carrying out this theory fell upon Gallatin. His guiding principles still were simplicity of administration and speedy extinction of all debt, and everything bent to these objects. Fighting or bribing the Barbary pirates was a mere question of expense. It was cheaper to seize Louisiana

than to await the settlement of doubtful points. Commercial warfare was to be avoided because of the cost. All wars were bad, but if they could not be evaded it was less extravagant to be ready than to rush to arms unprepared. Amid many difficulties, and thwarted even by Jefferson himself in the matter of the navy, Gallatin pushed on; and after six years the debt was as far as possible paid, a large surplus was on hand, a comprehensive and beneficent scheme of internal improvements was ready for execution, and the promised land seemed in sight. Then came the stress of war in Europe, a wretched neutrality at home, fierce outbreaks of human passions, and the fair structure of government by *à priori* theories based on the goodness of unoppressed humanity came to the ground. Gallatin was thrown helplessly back upon the rejected Federalist doctrine of government according to circumstances. He uttered no vain regrets, but the position was a trying one. The sworn foe of strong government, he was compelled, in pursuance of Jefferson's policy, to put into execution the embargo and the most stringent measures ever taken by an American legislature. He did his best, but

all was in vain. Commercial warfare failed, the embargo was repealed, and Jefferson, having hopelessly entangled foreign relations and brought the country to the verge of civil war, retired to private life defeated and broken, and leaving to his successor Madison, and to Gallatin, the task of extricating the nation from its difficulties. From 1809 the new administration, drifting steadily towards war, struggled on from one abortive and exasperating negotiation to another. It was a period of sore trial to Gallatin. The peace policy had failed, and nothing else replaced it. He had lost his hold upon Pennsylvania and his support in the House, while a cabal in the Senate, bitterly and personally hostile to the Treasury, crippled the administration and reduced every Government measure to mere inanity. At last, however, one of their blundering acts struck Napoleon in a vital spot. To escape its effects, he set himself to hoodwink the administration and trick the United States into war with England. The deception was successful, and was powerfully aided by a war party, violent and ignorant, but with plenty of fresh ability, full of the new spirit of nationality, and determined to fight at all hazards.

The result was inevitable, and Madison was forced to take the lead in June, 1812, in declaring war against England.

Gallatin never wasted time in futile complaints. His cherished schemes were shattered. War and extravagant expenditure had come, and he believed both to be fatal to the prosperity and progress of America. He therefore put the finances in the best order he could, and set himself to mitigate the evil effects of the war by obtaining an early peace. With this end in view he grasped eagerly at the proffered mediation of Russia, and without resigning the Treasury, sailed for Europe in May, 1813.

Russian mediation proved barren, but Gallatin persevered, catching at every opportunity for negotiation. In the midst of his labors came the news that his old foes in the Senate had refused to confirm his appointment. He still toiled on unofficially until, Madison having filled the Treasury, his nomination for the second time met the approval of the Senate, and he was able to proceed with direct negotiations. The English and American commissioners finally met at Ghent, and in the tedious and irritating discussions which ensued Gallatin took the leading part. He dealt easily with his an-

tagonists, who were all second-rate and obstinate persons, and drove them by quiet persistence and firmness from their first arrogant and impossible demands. His great difficulty lay in managing his own colleagues, who were, especially Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams, able men of strong wills and jarring tempers. He succeeded in preserving harmony, and thus established his own reputation as an able diplomat. Peace was his reward, and, after visiting Geneva for the first time since his boyhood, and negotiating a commercial convention with England, Gallatin returned to America.

He received an immediate offer of the Treasury, which he declined, but accepted the mission to France (1816), where he remained for the next seven years, which were in all probability the pleasantest of his life. He passed his time in thoroughly congenial society, seeing everybody of note or merit in Europe. He did not neglect the duties of his official position, but strove assiduously and with his wonted patience to settle the commercial relations of his adopted country with the nations of Europe.

In 1823 he resigned his post and returned to the United States, when he found himself plunged at once in the bitter struggle then in

progress for the presidency. His favorite candidate was his personal friend William H. Crawford, whom he regarded as the true heir and representative of the old Jeffersonian principles. With these feelings he consented to run for the vice-presidency on the Crawford ticket. But Gallatin had come home to new scenes and new actors, and he did not fully appreciate the situation. The contest was bitter, personal, factious, and full of intrigue. Van Buren, then in the Crawford interest, came to the conclusion that the candidate for the second place, by his foreign origin, weakened the ticket, and Gallatin therefore withdrew his name and retired from the contest without reluctance. The election, undecided by the popular vote, was thrown into the House, and resulted in the choice of J. Quincy Adams, who in 1826 drew Gallatin from his retirement and sent him as minister to England to conduct another complicated and arduous negotiation with that power. Gallatin worked at his new task with his usual industry, tact, and patience, but the results were meagre, although an open breach was successfully avoided. In 1828 he once more returned to the United States, and bade farewell to public life.

Accepting a business position in New York which gave him a sufficient income, Gallatin turned his attention to the congenial pursuits of science and literature. In both fields he displayed great talent, and his book upon Indian languages laid the foundations of the ethnology of the American aborigines. He continued, of course, to interest himself in public affairs, although no longer an active participant, and in all financial questions, especially in regard to the bank charter, the resumption of specie payments, and the panic of 1837, he exerted a wide and beneficial influence. The rise of the slavery question touched him nearly. Gallatin had always been a consistent opponent of slavery, and in the early days of the Government had boldly attacked that institution when unable to find a dozen men of any party to side with him. He felt keenly, therefore, the attempts of the South to extend the slave power and confirm its existence, and the remnant of his strength was devoted in his last days to writing and distributing two able pamphlets against the war with Mexico. Almost his last public act was a speech against the annexation of Texas; and, although more than eighty years old, he confronted a howling New York

mob with the same cool, unflinching courage which he had displayed half a century before when he faced the armed frontiersmen of Redstone Old Fort.

During the winter of 1848-9 his health failed, and on the 12th of August, 1849, he passed peacefully away.

Gallatin was twice married. His second wife was Miss Hannah Nicholson, of New York, by whom he had three children, two sons and a daughter, all of whom survived him. In personal appearance he was above middle height, with strongly-marked features, indicating great strength of intellect and character. He was reserved and extremely reticent, cold in manner and not sympathetic. There was, too, a certain Calvinistic austerity about him, but he was much beloved by his family. He was never a popular man, nor did he ever have a strong personal following, or many attached friends. He stood with Jefferson and Madison at the head of his party, and won his place by force of character, courage, application, and great intellectual power. His eminent and manifold services to his adopted country, his great abilities and upright character, assure him a high position in the history of the United States.



# ALBERT GALLATIN

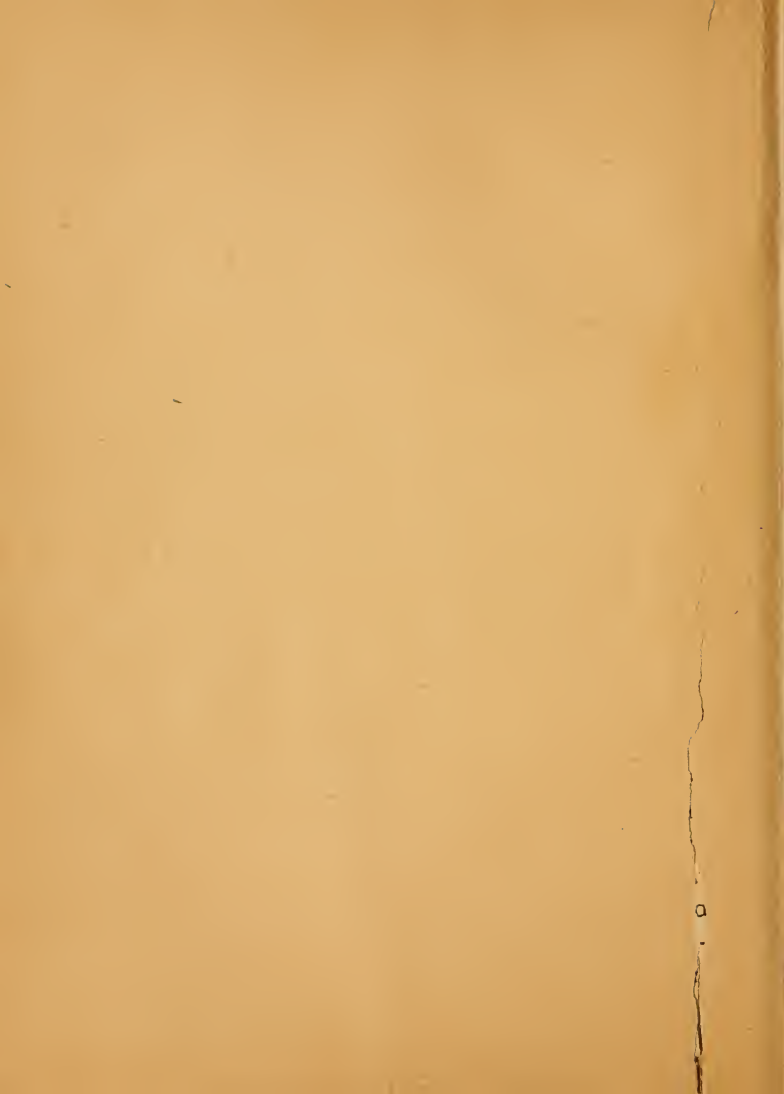
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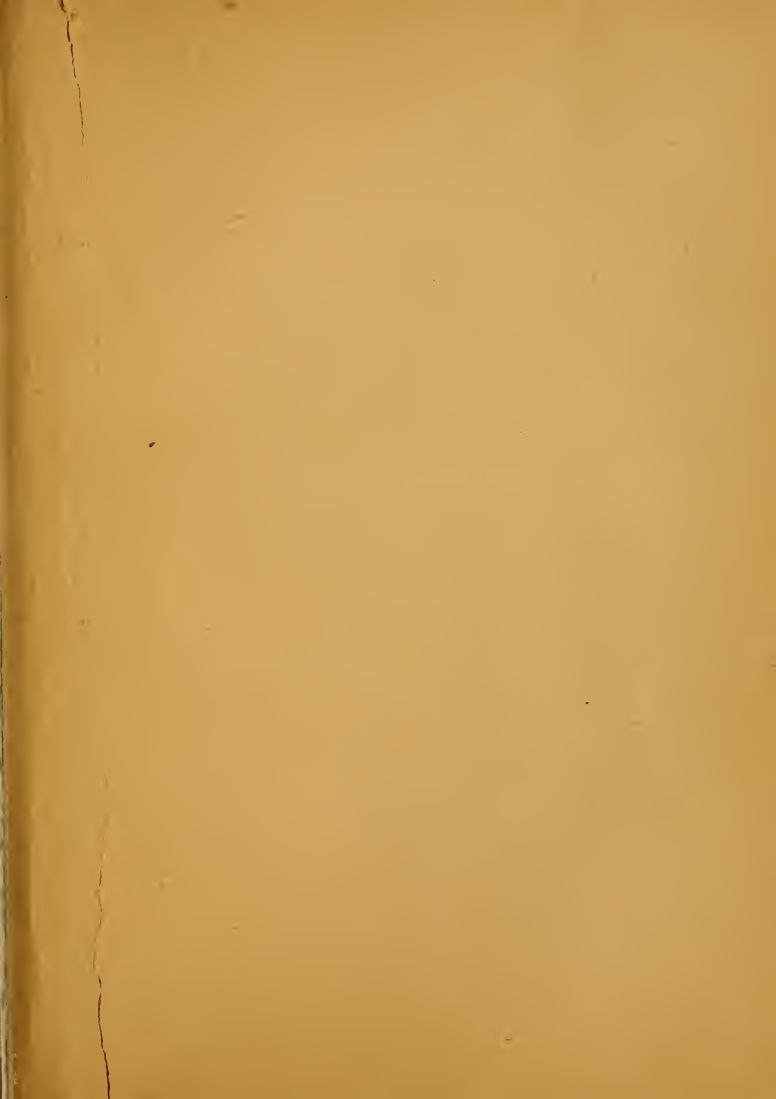
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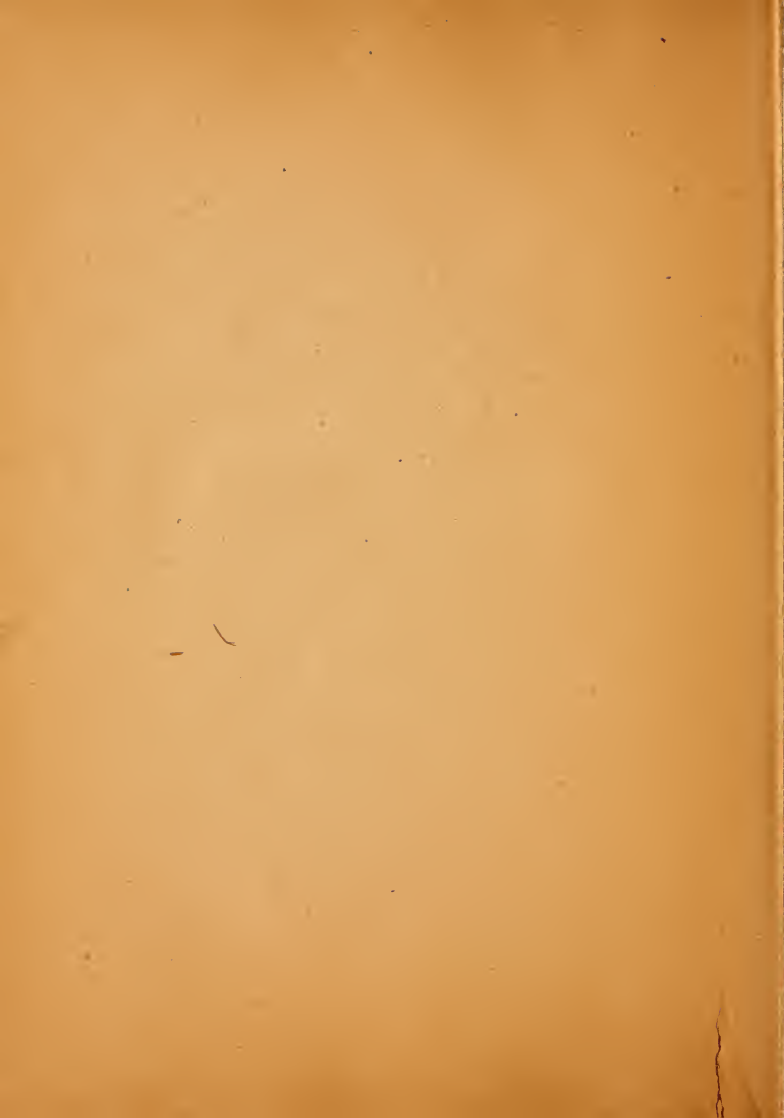












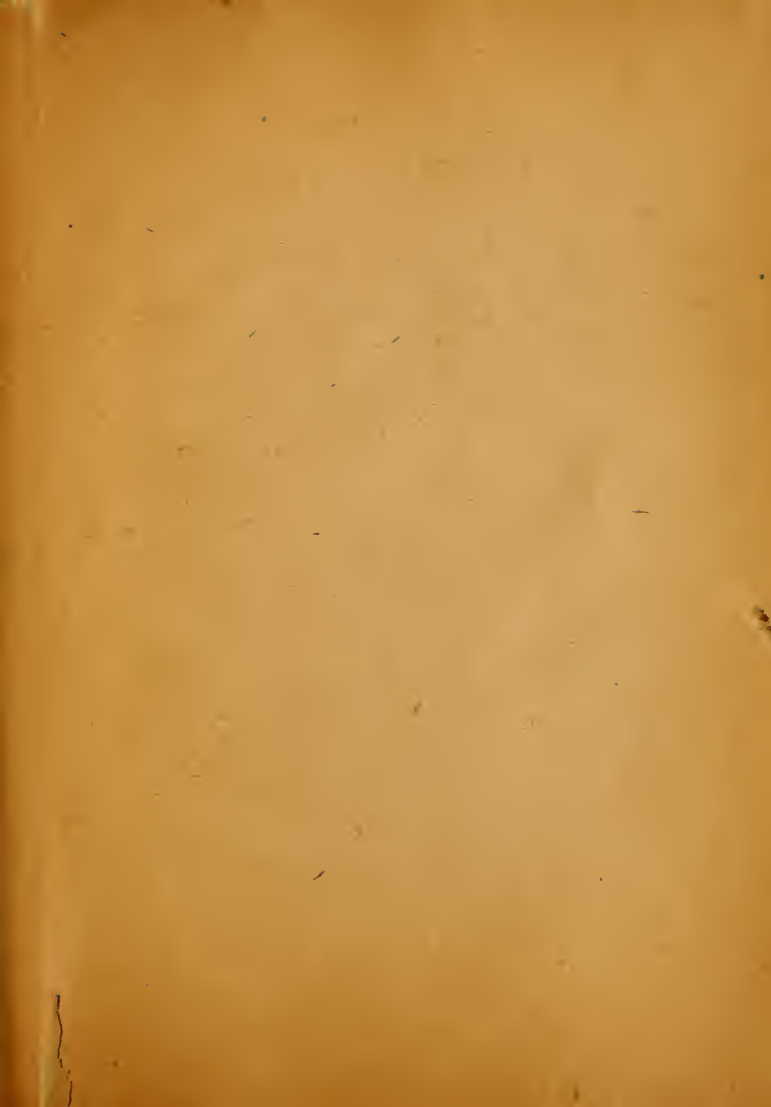
















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